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ABSTRACT

The main objectives of teaching ethics in the Communication Training and Development class are to encourage students to think in ethical terms, and to simulate experiences that reflect the choices and consequences of ethical and unethical behavior. This paper outlines an evolutionary classroom process with eight separate teaching components. The paper presents three sample ethics cases which can be used effectively in class discussions. (NKA)

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Incorporating Ethical Dimensions in the Communication Training and Development Curriculum

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The main objectives of teaching ethics in the Communication Training and Development class are to encourage students to think in ethical terms, and to simulate experiences that reflect the choices and consequences of ethical and unethical behavior. The teaching process can follow an evolutionary approach.

1. Teach about ethics in training and development. Research and discuss "ethics" and its relationship to training (definitions, etc.). Include ethical dimensions of human communication.
2. Facilitate a class discussion that helps students understand their relationship to ethical conduct. Two salient questions are how they learned about ethical behavior, and what established or accepted behavioral codes they follow.
3. Establish a series of ethical situations that require students to make ethical choice. (See sample ethics cases provided) The cases present a series of dilemmas that become increasingly complex and represent increasing "costs" to students as they make ethical/unethical decisions and formulate their behavior.

4. Set students up for a group discussion regarding the ethics cases. Impress upon them the different perspectives that may arise and the need to privilege each person's approach. Have them discuss the consequences of the different choices made, and what those choices might indicate about their ethical framework.
5. Choose one case and develop a role-play. In the role-play, students perform dialogue and actions that emerged from their group discussion. Students will simulate ethical dilemmas based on choices that they made and the likely consequences of their actions.
6. Debrief the role-play experience by asking students to comment on the process and provide alternative options to the dilemmas.
7. Have students brainstorm possible ethical issues they will face in their career and lifestyle choices.
8. Assign a written exercise to reinforce class content. Require students to either articulate their own code of ethics, or to list likely scenarios and their potential consequences. Another approach is to have students write their own case or role-play to be used in an ethics training session.

Case I

You have made a presentation to a client regarding the development and implementation of a Communication Skills training program for line managers and key lead personnel in a manufacturing environment. During follow-up phone conversations, your contact within the organization asks whether or not you have experience conducting needs assessments, since upper management has requested that one be done, on a limited bases, prior to the selection of participants. It is apparent from the tone of the conversations that your contact will take your word regarding the status of your previous experience.

While you have never conducted a field assessment, you know the basics and have taken a course in the area of needs assessment. You are positive that you could handle a "limited" needs assessment for the purpose of selecting training participants.

This is your first opportunity to work for a client of this size (Fortune 500) and you know from the discussions that a good performance on your part will probably lead to repeat business. Your consulting business is currently in a lull and the income would provide a "cushion" for the quarter.

What do you do?

Case II

You are going into the seventh month of an eighteen-month contract to provide training in problem-solving skills in a mid-sized public utility. Participant responses during the training and written evaluations have clearly indicated that most of the individuals attending the sessions had received adequate problem-solving training prior to your hiring. However, participants continue to be assigned (although absenteeism is high) and management has not indicated that they are dissatisfied. You also know that individual department budgets are "charged" for sending personnel to training sessions. You have spoken about the situation to the Training Director (who hired you based on the recommendation of a VP) and you were told, "Don't worry about it, it happens all the time. As for the absenteeism, just relax and teach whoever shows up. Look you're being paid for twenty participants whether they show or not, so you have nothing to complain about."

Prior to your next training session, you are called into an impromptu meeting with the VP of Operations and several line and staff managers. The Director of Training is in attendance and is seated across the conference table from you (the VP who recommended you is not in attendance). The VP of Operations thanks you for coming and then says, "We are establishing budgets for the next fiscal year and rising training costs have become an

issue. Some managers have expressed concerns over the cost effectiveness of our training programs and since you are our only outside training contractor at this time, I would like to know what your impressions are of our programs."

It took over fifteen months to land this contract and it represents about one third of your revenue for the current year.

What do you say?

Case III

You have just landed the biggest contract since you started your consulting and training business five years ago. The contract involves delivering three days of Management Training for all mid-level managers in a large financial services firm with locations in three states. The contract is in excess of $450,000 dollars for the first year. Follow-up contracts have been promised if the training is effective.

To meet the client's training schedule, you will be hiring three additional trainers and support personnel. This is exactly the break you had been waiting to get. A contract of this size will cover your basic operating costs and allow you to develop more business and increase your profitability.

Your "champion" throughout the competitive bidding process was the VP of Corporate Communication. You are sure that this individual made it all possible. Your immediate supervisor will be the Director of Human Resources, a close friend of the VP.

Two weeks prior to the start of the contract, you get an e-mail from the VP asking whether or not you had hired all of the trainers and staff personnel for the project. You respond explaining that you still had two staff positions open, but that you did not need to fill them immediately. The VP gives you

a call and mentions that they are going to have a friend send over their resume for you to consider. You receive the resume and question whether the person really has the background necessary for the position. As a personal favor to the VP, you call the person in for an interview.

During the interview, you discover that the applicant is actually a relative (by marriage) of the VP. The applicant explains that although he does not have all of the skills mentioned in the job description, he is quite sure that he could learn them quickly. You are not so sure. And, a quick check of the applicant's references indicates that his attendance has been a problem in previous positions.

You contact the Human Resource Manager to get some background information and to check on company policy regarding hiring of family members. You are told that since the person is only a relative by marriage and does not have the same last name, that it probably would not become an issue. The Human Resource Manager also says, "You ought to give the kid a try. You know, help him out a little. Besides, you can always let him go if things don't work out."

What do you do?